

Apuntes 81 (2017). doi: <https://doi.org/10.21678/apuntes.81.815>

ZAVALA, Virginia y Michele BACK, editoras, 2017, *Racismo y lengüaje*, Lima, Fondo Editorial de la Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú. 410 pp.

Racism is not only words: through the centuries it has claimed the lives of millions of people, sacrificed by prejudice but also by apathy and the cruel fear of what is different. Nevertheless, we have learned that racism employs a fiction: it constructs a character, the other, and incorporates him into a narrative that is articulated with the interests of whoever creates and proclaims it. That is, racism is a discursive fact; moreover, it need not stray from the realm of discourse to exercise its discriminatory violence. **To speak** is also a way of **acting**, of affecting reality: to insult, for example, is not simply to use certain words, but also to carry out an action and to achieve a very real effect, namely, the humiliation of the other. But the racist insult is not the only form in which racism operates on the level of discourse. Language not only transmits information or emotions; it also serves to negotiate our place (and the place of the other) in the world and to articulate the symbolic system that gives meaning to the distribution of power and resources: who merits what and why.

All this is well-known. Nevertheless, in Peru we did not have a text that would give the broader public access to specific cases that demonstrate this intimate connection between racism and linguistic usage. The vacuum has been filled by this stupendous book edited by Virginia Zavala (Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, PUCP) and Michele Back (University of Connecticut), and published by the Fondo Editorial of the PUCP. The book includes ten studies and a detailed introduction that places them among the most up-to-date literature in the field. The authors employ theoretical frameworks that are specially equipped to demonstrate how speaking is a social practice in which “individuals develop a variety of identifications [that are] always inscribed in power relations”⁶ (p. 21) to construct the elusive notion of race.

This volume presents Peruvian cases taken from different spheres. In addition to the traditional themes of advertising discourse and official political discourse, the book discusses subjects that are little studied in Peru such as the discourse of school students, public transport passengers, young entrepreneurs, and users of social media, as well as the relationship

6 All translations in this review are by *Apuntes*.

between race and gender in the Andean world. All these form an analytical framework whose conclusions lead in the same direction: it is in the new (and old) discursive practices of Peruvian society that racism has found a comfortable place, where pieces of discourse are resignified for it to maintain its discriminatory function, now that political correctness is used as exoneration from accusations of racism. The authors carry out a detailed analysis in order to unpick this new form of “racist speech” and show that racism, as language, is essentially a repertoire of “discursive and rhetorical resources which are available in a society that reproduces inequality” (p. 32). We will review each of them.

One group of articles examines the racialization of new categories and expressions that replace the former terms of racist discourse. Lenor Lamas scrutinizes the Universidad César Vallejo advertisement, “We are a Different Race” (*Somos una raza distinta*), which uses the representation of the entrepreneur (*emprendedor*⁷) to attract students, and compares it with another from the Universidad San Ignacio de Loyola, which features a businessperson (*empresario*); the author contends that the *emprendedor/empresario* contraposition reproduces the distinctions of white/non-white, urban/peasant, and other similar opposites. Margarita Huayhua analyzes passenger-to-passenger and driver-passenger interactions on a minibus that operates on the Cuzco-Uqhupata route, used primarily by teachers as well as some (indigenous/peasant) community members. During her study, Huayhua discovered that in the interaction between the two groups, the traditionally racialized terms (**cholo**, **mestizo**, **indio**) have been replaced by **disobedient**, **bad-mannered**, or **ignorant**. Meanwhile, Nathalie Koc-Menard investigates the evolution of the label **marginal** (*marginal*) in Chapi (Ayacucho), a community that was greatly affected by political violence; its inhabitants, victims of racism in the city, have assumed this label to present demands to the state regarding their needs, but through this appropriation, they have ended up accepting the racialization implicit in the term.

A second group of articles uses interviews to explore how racialized ideologies are constructed to uphold discrimination. Ylse Mesía studies the dialogues with students in one state and one private school and discovers that at the private school, students believe that “speaking well” (*hablar bien*) is borne of privilege, a result of going to a “good school” and not something that can be acquired later (which reveals a racialized maneuver), while students in the state school think that it is possible to acquire this ability later

7 Translator’s note: in Peru, the word “emprendedor” is generally used to refer to the owners of small and micro-enterprises.

in life. Victor Vich and Virginia Zavala interviewed young businesspeople from Lima's upper class and identified how they justify inequality (and the consequent status of privilege that they flaunt) by highlighting educational and cultural differences as a strategy for racially hierarchizing the population and conceptualizing economic accumulation as an inevitable consequence of the market.

The third group tracks social networks and finds evidence of racial language. Roberto Brañez analyzes the "amixer" category as it unfolds in interchanges on websites, and discovers that a complex stratification of the interlocutors lies behind the appearance of identifying orthographic differences, with fundamentally racial criteria evident in various minidiscursive strategies. Michele Back studies the reactions on Twitter to the use of Quechua by Keiko Fujimori and Claudio Pizarro: while the former was met with much criticism (due to her Japanese ancestry), the latter was highly praised: the author concludes that this shows Quechua to be a language that is "only for indigenous people," which reveals a racial essentialism. Isabel Wong examines the construction of "ppkausa"⁸ in a discussion on a Facebook account that purports to fight against racist practices, showing that the administrators, engaging in a kind of reverse racism, create a racialized subject based on skin color (*blankitos*, "whities"), education, and social class, which demonstrates the fertile space that online interactions provide for the development of racialized subjectivities.

Finally, a fourth group explores the complex relationship between racism and gender. Florence E. Babb presents an overview of discussions on these issues, examined from the point of view of the so-called "decolonial turn," and finds that including a gender perspective can contribute not only to a better understanding of how different forms of inequality are interrelated, but can also be used effectively to alleviate the injustices which derive from it. Eunice Cortez explores the image of Magaly Solier (the internationally known Andean actress and migrant) as it appears in different press interviews and commentaries and on television, and discovers that despite the racism and misogyny with which her detractors target her, Solier has managed to position herself as a model of an Andean women, modern and global, who uses Spanish and Quechua to express her various identities.

The variety and seriousness of the analyses position this book as an obligatory entry point for understanding the reality of Peruvian racism and

8 Translator's note: "ppkausa" is a term originating in election campaign publicity for the current president of Peru, Pedro Pablo Kuczynski. "Ppkausa" currently refers to anyone who supports the president, is a member of his party, etc.

its presence in discourse. They are also testimony to the fruitful research of Professor Zavala, whose students wrote a goodly number of the articles.

Miguel Rodríguez Mondoñedo
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, Lima
mmondon@pucp.pe